

Political Science, Department of
Faculty Publications-Political Science

Texas State University

Year 2005

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Promise for a PA Feminist Theory

Patricia M. Shields
Texas State University - San Marcos, Department of Political
Science, ps07@txstate.edu

CLASSICAL PRAGMATISM: ROOTS AND PROMISE FOR A PA FEMINIST THEORY

Patricia M. Shields
Texas State University

In a recent *Administrative Theory & Praxis* article, Janet Hutchinson and Hollie Mann (2004, p. 79) noted, "there is as yet no defining body of feminist theory in our field." They trace the lack of feminist theory to the historic exclusion of women from positions of power and the liberal, narrow, dominant model of administration in public administration that reduces the potential for ongoing feminist praxis. While the liberal historic concern with equity has led to many advances for women in public administration, it has restricted the creative development of a feminist PA theory. In response to these conditions Hutchinson and Mann (2004, p. 92) argue that PA scholars should "develop a body of feminist theories as well as a distinctly feminist praxis to add to the growing body of theoretical work in other disciplines."

Classical American Pragmatism is an untapped philosophy already linked to feminist discourse that can add and enrich PA feminist theory and praxis. This brief paper explores how classical pragmatism, a respected, comprehensive philosophy developed by Jane Addams, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, can contribute to defining a richer feminist PA theory. Over the last decade interest in classical pragmatism has grown. Both feminist philosophers and public administration scholars have sought to recover and extend classical pragmatism in their respective fields. Classical pragmatism, feminism and public administration are linked historically through the nexus of Hull-House. This paper highlights the connection between pragmatism, PA theory and feminist theory. It calls on PA feminist to explore these connections further.

PRAGMATISM AND FEMINISM

Over the last fifteen years, feminist philosophers have re-discovered classical pragmatism as a source of feminist theories. Works by Seigfried (1992, 1996, 2001), Duran (1993, 2001), Livingston (2001), Sullivan (2001), Keith (1999) and Whipps (2004), demonstrate the philosophic and historic links between pragmatism and feminism. One might wonder why it has taken so long to connect pragmatism and feminism? This is in part because pragmatism itself was eclipsed by logical positivism

during the middle decades of the 20th century. In the process it was lost from feminine discourse (Seigfried, 1996, p. 18).

Ironically, the very features of pragmatism that led to its decline are the characteristics that feminists now consider its "greatest strength" (Seigfried, 1996, p. 21). These are "persistent and early criticisms of positivist interpretations of scientific methodology; disclosure of value dimension of factual claims"; viewing aesthetics as informing everyday experience; subordinating logical analysis to political, cultural and social issues; linking the dominant discourses with domination; "realigning theory with praxis; and resisting the turn to epistemology and instead emphasizing concrete experience" (p. 21).

The pragmatism of Dewey, Addams and Mead emphasized concepts like cooperation, caring and community. These are obviously themes that emerge consistently in feminist writings and are in contrast to the models of competition and laissez faire that dominated the late 19th and early 20th century landscape. Further, pragmatism unites cooperation, caring and community with theories of democracy and inquiry consistent with the spirit of scientific investigation that captivated the imaginations of people at the time.

The women students of Dewey and Mead were attracted and empowered by the "thesis that theory arises directly from and is accountable to experience" (Seigfried, 1996, p. 57). This encouraged them to trust their own experience even when their experiences appeared to challenge existing rigid belief systems. In her path-breaking book, *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric*, Charlene Haddock Seigfried (p. 57) notes that experience for pragmatists "is not simply uncritically reproduced; it is interrogated as to its value for a richer, fuller more expansive life." Therefore, knowledge was as "outcomes of experimentation according to some end-in-view." Further, both experience and experimental understanding (knowledge) were socially and contextually based. Experience and knowledge have the potential to dynamically interact with tradition and community to create positive change. One can observe most of these themes in Addams (1910, pp. 125-126) explanation of the Settlement.

The Settlement, then is an experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city. . . . From its very nature it [the Settlement] can stand for no political or social propaganda. It must in a sense, give the warm welcome of an inn to all such propaganda, if perchance one of them be found an angel. The one thing to be dreaded in the Settlement is that it lost its flexibility, its

power of quick adaptation, its readiness to change its methods as its environment may demand. It must be open to conviction and must have a deep and abiding sense of tolerance. It must be hospitable and ready for experiment. It should demand from its residents a scientific patience in the accumulation of facts and the steady holding of their sympathies as one of the best instruments for that accumulation.

JANE ADDAMS AND HULL-HOUSE

One of the by products of the feminist philosophers' exploration of pragmatism is to resurrect Jane Addams, as a founder of the philosophy (Luizzi & McKinney, 2001). Jane Addams, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead developed their philosophies as all three became friends, influenced each other and were engaged in the Hull-House experience and in women's rights causes.

A common, understandable misconception is that Hull-House was an 1890s version of a modern soup kitchen/homeless shelter. Hull-House had a broader objective. The residents of Hull-House were creating community and citizens (Elshtain, 2002, pp. 152-153). The large Hull-House complex became part of the community as it addressed the needs of the nearby impoverished, diverse, immigrant community. Within its walls one could find labor and art museums, a day nursery, college extension courses, (that emphasized art, literature, language, mathematics, history, music, and drawing), a coffee house, Sunday concerts, a summer school, a choir, at least 25 clubs, cooking classes, free kindergarten, facilities for organized labor to meet, speaker series, dances, a gymnasium, a coffee house, and a public dispensary (drug store). Speakers such as John Dewey, George Herbert Mead, W. E. B. DuBois, Susan B. Anthony, and Theodore Roosevelt, lectured at Hull-House. Some of the services were self-supporting (coffee house, dispensary). Others were subsidized through private funding. Hull-House was also a source of neighborhood activism often going head to head with Chicago's corrupt political machine.

But, what of the feel or lived-experience of Hull-House? Jean Elshtain (2002, p. 9) captured this through interviews with women in their seventies that had learned, loved and played at Hull-House as children. These women spoke to their experience at Hull-House and the woman, Jane Addams. "Miss Jane Addams was like a mother to us. . . . Our Hull-House was like a home, a well-kept home." We were "introduced to so many things. It was a rich environment." All children received personal attention, "You weren't just some kid. They wanted

you to be the best you could be. . .it was done with such a caring and loving way” (p. 13). Hull-House was a place brimming with diversity. The staff included both men and women. The local community was filled with immigrants from around the globe as well as African Americans fleeing the repressive South. The children’s classes reflected this diversity. “We didn’t give it (multi ethnic classes) another thought. . .Hull-House brought us together. We played and worked with everybody. Everybody was equal. . . We were children. She taught us to respect each other’s traditions” (p. 13). These words capture the feel or experience of Hull-House and echo feminist themes.

Hull-House was a place of formal inquiry and innovation. In the early 1890s Jane Addams and her colleague Florence Kelley supervised the writing and production of *Hull-House Maps and Papers* (1895). *Maps and Papers* is an extraordinary book that describes (using detailed maps) the 18 nationalities that resided in the area. The field-based research methods and the innovative mapping techniques developed by the residents of Hull-House have been suggested as a prototype for ideas later espoused by the Chicago Department of Sociology (Deegan, 1988). *Maps and Papers* also contained chapters that dealt with threats to children life and limbs due to lax enforcement of child labor laws, practices in the garment industry that led to serious public health risks (typhoid), and dangerous and inhumane conditions in Chicago’s charity wards.

PRAGMATISM AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

At about the same time feminists were discovering pragmatism, public administration scholars were doing the same thing. Stever (1993), Snider (2000), Evans (2000), Shields (1996, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2004), Stolcis (2004), Miller (2004), McSwite (1997), and Webb (2004) all have contributed to the discussion. Snider (2000) demonstrated that PA overlooked the pragmatism of Dewey and James for reasons that echo the earlier feminist blind spot.

In the spirit of a feminist pragmatism, and as someone engaged in the application of pragmatism to public administration, it seems appropriate to share my experience exploring pragmatism and its connection to public administration. I was initially attracted to pragmatism because it offered a constructive alternative to the neoclassical economic paradigm (a form of logical positivism) that is so pervasive in the theory and practice of policy and management. Because pragmatism dwells in the tangled, muddy, painful, and perplexing concrete world of experience (James, 1907, p. 21), it included the public administration practitioner

and her experience in a way that other theoretical frameworks failed to do. It helped to define the PA policy imprint, PA's unique stamp on public policy (Shields, 1996).

My interest was further sparked as I began to apply the principles of pragmatic inquiry from Dewey's (1910, 1938) *Logic and How We Think* to my research methods class (Shields 1998 & 2003a). The practitioner students began to win awards for their papers and more importantly repeatedly testified to a transformation in their ability to think critically and contribute at work. They were thrilled and excited by their personal transformations. I also used these very principles in my role as MPA director and as our program prepared for re-accreditation (the process of undergoing the self-study and site visit). We used Dewey and Addams' "community of inquiry" principles to define our problematic situation, develop working hypotheses, and engage the community (faculty, students, advisory board, deans, alumni, etc.). The process of engagement flowed from Dewey and Addams' notion of participatory democracy.

In the process of studying pragmatism, I also stumbled across the work of Charlene Haddock Seigfried (1996) and M. Deegan (1988). The two introduced me to the scholar/philosopher/public administrator Jane Addams. She was much more than the social worker/peace activist I had stereotyped her as. She was a productive, creative scholar and intellect in her own right. Moreover, she ran a large, effective non-profit organization and occasionally worked for Cook County (as garbage inspector). She was a public administrator! This insight was confirmed by Camilla Stivers' (2000) path breaking book *Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era*. Here she used persuasive evidence and cogent arguments to link the settlement movement and Jane Addams to an un-recovered public administration history.

The discovery that both philosophy and public administration could claim Jane Addams as a founder was energizing. Not only did pragmatism embrace practitioners and their experiences; the women's experience at Hull House shaped the philosophy. I was hooked because I have seen first hand, how employing pragmatic principles of inquiry had informed the re-accreditation process and energized student practitioners making them more effective on the job (as reported by their supervisors "you have changed" and subsequent promotions). I had found a theory, praxis nexus that was both fun and at time magical. It resonated with my own experience, informed my growing ability to teach and be the MPA Director.

CONCLUSION

Jane Duran (1993, p. 7) demonstrates that the “the core of the two theories (feminism and pragmatism) are very similar.” She concludes, however, by asserting a more compelling connection. Pragmatism and feminism are similar “because most women are pragmatists. And it is the experience of women’s lived lives that pragmatism and feminism both speak.” My own experience reinforces Duran’s insight.

What other philosophic framework has a woman as a founder, is embraced by feminist philosophers, has direct links to public administration history and contributes to our contemporary understandings of democracy? It is time that public administration feminist theorists take a serious look at Classical American Pragmatism.

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